Australian Bureau of Statistics

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ABS keeps the ACT in focus

The latest edition of the Australian Bureau of Statistics publication **Australian Capital Territory in Focus 1999,** released today, has a host of new features shedding more light on the ACT economy and its people.

The innovations include information on rental investors, housing, and new and expanding service industries such as information technology, culture and the arts. The chapter on the labour force has been improved with an article on the teenage labour market, as well as covering topics such as underemployment, reason for leaving last full-time job, and the job search experience of the unemployed.

The chapter on health has been significantly revamped to include Medicare statistics and survey results on the use of medications information, immunisation, and prevalence of respiratory conditions. There is also an expanded chapter dealing with the Australian Capital Region.

The statistical summary of what's been happening in the ACT is the local equivalent of the Australian Yearbook. It is used as a major resource tool by business, government and schools in the ACT and covers topics including the economy, people, government, education, health, housing, tourism and transportation.

Some highlights of the publication are:

People
People in the ACT showed a different pattern of health-related lifestyle behaviours from Australians in general. More specifically ACT people:

- are the most active when it comes to participation in sport or physical activity, with 63.6% people 18 and over participating, compared to 47.8% nationally. Swimming and aerobics/ fitness were the most popular sports with 20.4% and 16.1% (respectively) of people participating.
- were less likely to smoke (21%) and more likely to exercise at a moderate level (43%) than people living elsewhere in Australia;
- had the highest proportion of adults consuming alcohol in the week prior to the National Health Survey (64%);
- recorded the highest proportion of people suffering from respiratory conditions (42.5%), compared to the national average of 37.4%;
- were more likely to use medications (72.9%) compared to 68.7% nationally;
- had a high incidence of mental disorder (21.1% - one in five), compared to just over one in six nationally;
- reported more illnesses than people in other States and Territories (89.3% compared to

84.8% nationally)

Emerging trends in the ACT

- The population has grown slightly by 0.13% to 308,411 people in 1997-98.
- The private sector is becoming more important with 52% (72,800 people) of wage and salary earners employed in the private sector at August 1998, compared to 48% (67,800) employed in the public sector. However, the private sector employees earned only 35% ($1,799.8 m) of total wages and salaries with 65% ($3,364.1 m) paid to public sector employees.
- There were 567 fewer child care places in February 1999 (down 4.7% on the previous year) and 30 fewer licensed child care centres (244).
- The number of criminal incidents recorded by police in the ACT was 41,130 in the 12 months to June 1998, a decrease of 2.1% (881).
- The total fertility rate decreased to 1.6 children in 1997. This is lower than the Australian total fertility rate of 1.8 children per woman and is the lowest in the country.
- A higher proportion of people are getting married in the ACT with marriages up 13.2% on the previous year and divorces down by 5.1% from the previous year.

Economic indicators and Industry trends

Despite a downturn in the construction and housing industry (total construction fell by 9.5% or $72 million in 1997-98 to 685.2 million), and a decline in manufacturing (turnover down by 1.3% to $594 million and employment down 2.5% or 100 persons) the economy was showing signs of picking up in 1997-98 with a number of key indicators showing improvement:

- In 1997-98 the ACT experienced strong economic growth with Gross State Product rising by 5.8% in current prices and stood at $12,111 million;
- Retail sales continued to be a major contributor to the ACT economy with a turnover of $2.6 billion in 1997-98, showing an annual increase of 5.6%;
- New motor vehicle registrations rose by 44%;
- Employment statistics showed signs of improvement, with the annual average unemployment rate falling to 7.5% (down from 7.9% the previous year) while the participation rate stayed the same at 74.1%;
- The number of visitors to the ACT in 1997-98 was up by 8.7% on the previous year to 1.7 million due to a large increase in domestic tourism. Takings from tourist accommodation increased by $1.6 million to $22.3 million in 1998.

Full details are in **Australian Capital Territory in Focus 1999** (cat. no. 1307.8) available in ABS bookshops.

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